ABSTRACT
        Through oral languaging children learn to share
ideas, to shape ideas, to structure thought, and to develop thinking
skills. In order to plan appropriate and effective oral communication
environments, teachers need to be aware of the factors that shape and
influence communication environments cr situaticns. There are three
scales or ccntinua of determinancy that can be used to describe how a
speech style matches a talk context. Teachers will want to create
different talk contexts, and therefore encourage the use and
development cf different speech styles by manipulating the factors of
group size, relationships among group members, and physical
arrangements cf groups. Such arrangements could lead toward the use
of intimate, casual, consultative, and formal speech styles. Learning
can take place in all four contexts and, by attention to factors such
as group size, speaker-listener relationships and distancing, the
type and nature of children's previous experiences, and the type of
subject matter, teachers can create for their students real contexts
for appropriate communications. (HOD)

TALK CONTEXTS AND SPEECH STYLES:

PLANNING FOR ORAL LANGUAGING

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Children in today's classrooms are probably being given more
opportunities than ever to talk and interact orally, and to learn
through oral communication. Through oral languaging children learn to
share ideas, to shape ideas, to structure thought, and to develop
thinking skills. Various styles of teaching such as the discovery and
inquiry approaches rely very much on oral communication and discussion
among the teacher and pupils, and among the children themselves.

In order to plan appropriate and effective oral communication
environments teachers need to be aware of the factors that shape and
influence communication environments or situations. In this article I
will discuss those factors, and show how the structuring of talk
contexts also affects the speech styles that children can be expected
to adopt, use, or develop. I am going to tie in this discussion with
a recent article on designing talk environments for children, with the
purpose of expanding and elaborating an essential part of the construct
present in that article, namely that of talk contexts.

Marvin Klein, in the September, 1979 issue of Language Arts
(pp. 647-656), presented what I think is the most extensive framework
yet developed for designing oral language tasks and situations for
children in classrooms. His framework consists of three components
which he calls talk purposes, talk contexts, and talk planning. The
talk purposes are more prescriptive than they are descriptive of the

functions of children's language. They are prescriptive because their purpose is to develop competence in various social requirements and functions of talk.

The second component of Klein's framework is talk contexts, and it is this component that forms the basis for my discussion. Talk contexts are in fact communication situations or settings where language use occurs. An important aspect of talk contexts is that they match speech styles. Children and adults will use or develop a particular style of speech, also known as register (Halliday, 1964; Ure, 1969; Halliday, McIntosh & Strevens, 1972), according to the context in which they interact. I'll begin by taking a look at the factors which influence speech styles, and which characterize talk contexts.

Three Determining Factors

There are three scales or continua of determinancy which can be used to describe how a speech style matches a talk context. Each scale shows how the factor determines the speech style that language users can be expected to adopt or use in the particular situation. The scales show factors ranging along a continuum because factors should not be considered as category systems or as discrete entities. The first scale is that of group or audience size.

GROUP OR AUDIENCE SIZE

dyadic	small	large

All speech styles and talk contexts are responsive to and influenced by group size. The larger the group or audience the more formal the style; the smaller the group, down to a dyad (two persons), the less formal the style. In the classroom the largest group is usually the whole class, though beyond the classroom it could be several classes or the assembled school. The numbers of children in groups for oral language activities will influence to a large extent the style of speech that children will use.

Another determining factor is that of the speaker-listener relationship. Since this determining factor varies along a continuum also it is best shown in terms of a scale.

SPEAKER-LISTENER RELATIONSHIP

intimate	friendly	formal

The relationship between children in a group will influence their use of language. The relationship is interdependent to a large extent with group size. The speaker-listener role constantly changes back and forth unless there is a dominant speaker in a talk context. Dominance in any talk context tends to lead to a more formal talk context and speech style. The degree to which interaction occurs depends on the nature of the speaker-listener relationship. An intimate relationship is likely to exist in a dyad where both children know each other very well. The same pair will interact differently between themselves as part of a larger group. Their relationship as

group size grows will become more formal, and this will be reflected in their using a more formal style of speech.

A third determining factor is that of speaker-listener distantiation. The scale might look like this:

SPEAKER-LISTENER DISTANTIATION

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tete-a-tete   distant

This factor is useful in planning how children can be grouped to form talk contexts, and in particular the physical arrangements for grouping. The scale suggests that as the speaker-listener (audience) distance increases so the situation becomes more formal. When a teacher wants to create a casual and friendly or intimate context she asks a small number of children to sit around her on a carpeted floor, as closely as possible. She minimizes the speaker-listener distance. When children are asked to orally report to the class, as when giving a book report, they often will stand in front of the class who are seated at their desks. The speaker-listener distance is far, and a formal context is created.

Four Speech Styles

Through manipulation of the three factors just discussed talk contexts are created in which various styles of speech can be anticipated. It is important that children develop a repertoire of speech styles which allow them to interact appropriately in a variety of social contexts.

Teachers will want to create different talk contexts, and therefore encourage the use and development of different speech styles, by manipulating the factors of group or audience size, relationships among group members, and physical arrangements of groups.

Klein in his article discusses five categories of talk contexts. They are the intrapersonal communication context, dyadic (two-person) communication context, small group communication context, public communication context, and mediated communication context. I am going to use different descriptions, and reduce the categories to four. My rationale for doing this is that one communication context (intrapersonal) exists as talk for self, one (mediated) involves indirect communication through media, but also to more closely align talk contexts with styles of speech. In this discussion, then, I am borrowing four of the five styles developed by Joos (1967). These are the intimate, casual, consultative, and formal.

SPEECH STYLES

INTIMATE	CASUAL	CONSULTATIVE	FORMAL

The four styles should not be interpreted as being discrete, as representing a category system, and so they are shown ranging along a scale as are the three determining factors of talk contexts. The least formal style is to the left of the scale, the most formal to the right. Sometimes more than one speech style will occur in a particular talk context. For example, two children role-playing an interview with a

pioneer in a social studies presentation might use both casual (the pioneer)
and consultative (the interviewer) styles. For establishing classroom
language situations or talk contexts the four styles are useful.

The first speech style and talk context is the intimate. The
intimate style reflects the use of language that operates almost at the
thought level of both speaker and listener. It is characterized by an
economy of words and a high incidence of nonverbal communication such as
gestures and facial expressions. It is also characteristic of speakers
who know each other very well. There is a lot of implicit background
knowledge, and the participants mutually recall much of this shared
knowledge and experience. When we pair children for discussion who know
each other very well, and particularly when we allow them to talk about
shared personal experiences, we can expect them to adopt an intimate
style of speech. The intimate context corresponds to Klein's dyadic
(two-person) communication context.

A casual talk context and speech style is likely to occur when three
to five children are grouped to orally discuss a shared experience such
as a game or sport, social event, or field trip that the class participated
in. The casual style assumes a shared background, but individual inter-
pretation and response will help to broaden the meaning potential for
group members. There is free and easy interchange between group members,
and inconventional usage such as slang and colloquialism might mark this
style. Syntactically, sentences are not necessarily completed. This
talk context corresponds to the small group communication context.

The consultative situation is probably the one which by nature is prevalent in most classrooms. It is also the one in which most adults probably engage in their daily work and business affairs. In the classroom the consultative context is created when six to nine children are grouped to discuss some specific or prescribed content, that is, subject matter that does not come necessarily from the shared or personal experience of the group or its members. A consultative context also prevails in most teacher-directed questioning sequences, and in teacher-initiated class discussion. The consultative style is indicative of persons who have a limited shared background. It features free and easy participation of group members, though one or more dominant speakers might arise. Sentences are complete, and background information is supplied, rather than implied as it is in less formal situations. This context fits midway between Klein's small group communication context and his public communication context.

The fourth talk context and speech style is the formal one which corresponds to Klein's public communication context. A formal situation is created when a child is asked to give an oral presentation to his or her class. The formal style is characterized by complete sentences that reflect a logical development of thought and careful planning. Background information is provided by the speaker, and language is rehearsed rather than being impromptu. The speaker is the dominant or even soul user of language while the listeners' active participation is minimal.

A very important factor is that of subject matter. This factor is

difficult to represent as a continuum. Less formal speech styles such
as the intimate and casual, and to varying extents the consultative,
are characterized by shared experiances or common experiences, where most
or all background information is already provided and therefore taken for
granted. This makes the casual context, where three to five children
interact, particularly appropriate for discussion of such experiences as
individual response to literature, and for discussion of and follow-up
to field trips.

The consultative and formal contexts are characterized by limited
or no shared experience, and therefore much background information needs
to be disseminated among group members or supplied to the group. These
contexts then are especially appropriate for the sharing of information
and content. The consultative context which allows for speaker-listener
interchange throughout certainly works well in elementary school class-
rooms. Teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions readily occur. In
the formal situation the onus for learning rests almost solely with the
listener, and there is minimal or no lis ener participation. The formal
context is associated with the lecture approach.

Learning, of course, takes place in all fc * contexts, and learning
to be a social being occurs in all contexts. Speakers learn to adapt
their language to different contexts, and there is a definite relation-
ship between talk contexts and speech styles. The style of speech
adopted by a speaker can serve, in fact, to either include or exclude
that person from a group.

Elementary school teachers can provide opportunities for their pupils to develop and use a repertoire of speech styles appropriate to different contexts in which children do, and will, become involved. By attention to factors such as group size, speaker-listener relationships and distancing, the type and nature of children's previous experiences, and the type of subject matter, teachers can create for their pupils 'real' contexts for appropriate communications.

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